

# THE ASYLUM

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“The love of learning, the sequestered nooks,  
And all the sweet serenity of books.”



HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW  
1807-1882

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# The Asylum

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Front Cover: Image of a terra-cotta medallion by J.-B. Nini, Storelli LIX. From A. Storelli, *Jean-Baptiste Nini: Sa Vie — Son Œuvre* (Tours: A. Mame et Fils, 1896), p. 109.



# Revolutionizing the Numismatic Reference

*Howard Spindel*

Like it or not, the computer age is upon us, and there is no avoiding it as a numismatist. Auction bidding in many venues (e.g., Heritage and eBay) is performed online. Countless numismatic discussion groups and websites permeate the electronic ether.

In the face of all this progress, should numismatic references remain the staid, simple page-turners of yore? Does a computerized reference simply mean copying the text of the reference to a computer-readable CD/DVD? I say to both questions, emphatically, "No!" A properly designed computerized numismatic reference is *much* more than a book simply rendered onto a CD/DVD.

This article draws on my experience working on a computerized reference for U.S. Shield Nickels (the Shield Nickel Viewer, or SNV) to illustrate the features of a computerized numismatic reference that is designed to use the inherent advantages of the technology. That I chose to create a Shield Nickel reference reflects my collecting bent; the techniques discussed should be applicable to any numismatic reference.

There is an undeniable pleasure in holding that big reference book in your lap and thumbing through it. Although this pleasure can't be replaced, the loss can be ameliorated by the new pleasures inherent in a reference work that takes full and appropriate advantage of available technology.

## STATIC VS. DYNAMIC

A printed reference book is a static, unchanging object. Every time you peruse it, it presents exactly the same information to you in exactly the same way.

Numismatics is not a static pursuit. New research, changing marketplaces, and reinterpretation of existing data make the information of numismatics dynamic. Above all else, a computerized numismatic reference should reflect the dynamic nature of the underlying information.



The computer, with data stored in a changeable, somewhat ephemeral method, is extremely well-suited to respond rapidly to changes in a dynamic environment.

Other sections of this article point out specific ways in which a computerized reference can be dynamic. *But the underlying principle of dynamism is, I believe, the single most important advantage of any properly designed computerized reference.* Any computerized reference that fails to be dynamic has failed in its most basic mission — to replace a printed reference book in a way that offers unique advantages that the book cannot offer.

### PRODUCTION COSTS

There are multiple drivers to the cost of a physical book:

- How large an audience is there? How many copies will be sold? Can the price of the book be amortized over a large audience?
- How much information is provided in the book? More information means a larger book and a higher cost.
- How many people have a finger in the pie (e.g., author, publisher, printing house, retailer)?
- How much does it cost to ship a purchased book to end user? Even at media mail rates, this is usually about \$4.

All of these costs of a printed book must be balanced in a way that makes the project economically feasible. This may be especially difficult for numismatic references; they are unlikely to appear on any national bestseller list! Furthermore, these cost drivers push printed numismatic reference books to be fairly general, so as to attract as wide an audience as possible.

In contrast, here are the cost drivers for a computerized reference:

- Purchase of a CD/DVD burner. This is a one-time cost of about \$100.
- Purchase of blank recordable media (\$0.10 to \$3.00 each, depending on the media used).
- The cost to ship a single CD/DVD in a padded mailer is about \$1.00.

A computerized reference work is an extremely efficient way for a numismatic author to self-publish. Very short runs of the reference can be

produced — copies can be produced to order, avoiding the need to maintain unsold inventory — this means that the reference can be highly specialized, without regard to what would sell in a mass market. A dedicated numismatist who wants to share his expertise and narrowly focused research is enabled to do so. Nobody else needs to be compensated. In the event that a particular computerized reference were to become very popular, then it would become feasible to have the CD/DVDs produced by a mastering company that stamps them in the thousands, further reducing production costs.

#### DEVELOPMENT COSTS

Most of the development costs and time for either a physical book or a computerized reference will be approximately the same. Each reference requires that the requisite material be gathered, organized, and presented as a cohesive whole.

Because a computerized reference may need custom computer programming, some additional expense and time may need to be budgeted during development. The expense and time are well worth it if it results in additional functionality in the reference. It's my opinion that this additional expense and time will typically be a small fraction of the expense and time of generating the numismatic content. By far, the largest time consumed in developing SNV was taking and editing photographs of coins.

#### NUMBER AND QUALITY OF PHOTOGRAPHS PRESENTED

Most numismatic references are about coins, and a book about coins without pictures of those coins would be like trying to enjoy an Ansel Adams exhibit only by reading about it. When you add photographs to a printed reference, the reference gets fatter. When you add high-quality color photographs (as opposed to black and white), the costs go way up.

In contrast, a computerized reference book full of high-resolution color photographs can fit on a single DVD. And adding additional photographs to that DVD adds nothing to the cost of burning and shipping it. The number of full-color high-resolution photos in SNV (about 2500) was inconceivable in a printed reference, but it currently fills a little more than half of a single DVD.

## SIZE OF THE BOOK

As previously mentioned, cost constrains the size of a physical reference book. But if the ability to add photographs to a DVD is for all practical purposes unlimited, the ability to add additional text is even more so. A computerized reference book can contain *all* of the information that the author deems relevant. (That doesn't mean it doesn't need a good editor, though!)

## UPDATING WITH NEW MATERIAL

A computerized reference must be designed from the ground up to provide a way to easily incorporate new material. The new material can be corrections to existing material, or it can be completely new content. Regardless, the properly designed computerized reference incorporates new material in a way that is invisible to the end user — it is merged seamlessly with the existing material. But if the user wants to see what's new, the computerized reference should allow him to do that as well.

It is true that updates or addenda can be distributed for a printed reference book. But unless that book undergoes a complete reprinting, the new data is not seamlessly integrated with the existing book.

## USER CONTRIBUTIONS, OR MAIL PHOTOS NOT COINS

For many numismatic reference works, authors have to rely on the generosity of others to photograph holdings. The author who can own everything he or she would want to document is a very rare bird. Many collectors are understandably reluctant to commit their rare coins to the vagaries of the post office. Insurance is little compensation for an irreplaceable coin. In my own work I set down standards for photography, and collectors who owned digital cameras were able (with some training) to submit photographs to me by email.

While some collectors still wound up mailing coins to me, several collectors were able to take their own photographs and submit them. Taking and contributing photographs was fun for these collectors, and of course their contributions are recognized by name.

## SEARCHING AND INTERACTIVITY

A printed reference book does not interact with its reader. The information is presented in the way that the author intended, and it is not



Shield Nickel Viewer v3.4 422 records (422 visible)

File Select Special Filters Help

Filter

Autofilter

Autofilter On

Filter This Group

Remove Last Filter

Remove All Filters

Show Comp

Show Pics

User Pics

User Data

Year	Prf	Obverse	Reverse	Modifier	DDO	DDR	RPD	MPD	OVD	ML	Attributions	Comments
1866		a: Notched arrow	l: With rays	None	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	S1-0000	Typical 1866 normal die
1866		a: Notched arrow	l: With rays	None	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	S1-1000 F-22 FS-001	SW Major   Note circular die polish lines b...
1866		a: Notched arrow	l: With rays	None	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	S1-1001 F-23	DS Minor
1866		a: Notched arrow	l: With rays	None	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	S1-1002	SE Minor
1866		a: Notched arrow	l: With rays	None	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	S1-3000 F-08 FS-001	1866 northeast   Early die stage, no die cr...
1866		a: Notched arrow	l: With rays	None	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	S1-3000.5 F-08 FS-00	1866 northeast   Later die stage, die crac...
1866		a: Notched arrow	l: With rays	None	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	S1-3001 F-10 FS-001	1866 southeast   Earlier die stage only sh...
1866		a: Notched arrow	l: With rays	None	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	S1-3001.3 F-10 FS-00	1866 southeast   Later die stage, cracks ...
1866		a: Notched arrow	l: With rays	None	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	S1-3001.5 F-10 FS-00	1866 southeast   Later die stage, cracks ...
1866		a: Notched arrow	l: With rays	None	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	S1-3001.3 F-10 FS-001.3	1866 southeast   Later die stage, cracks ...
1866		a: Notched arrow	l: With rays	None	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	S1-3003 F-16 FS-001.3	1866 south
1866		a: Notched arrow	l: With rays	None	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	S1-3004 F-10.01	1866 east (more visible on earlier die sta...
1866		a: Notched arrow	l: With rays	None	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	S1-3005 F-12	1866 south   Coin from Clarence Gilstad
1866		a: Notched arrow	l: With rays	None	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	S1-3006 F-13 FS-001.4	1866 north   Coin from the Sunnywood C...
1866		a: Notched arrow	l: With rays	None	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	S1-3007 F-09	1866 south   Coin from J. V. Jones
1866		a: Notched arrow	l: With rays	None	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	S1-3007.5 F-09	1866 south   Late die stage shows extre...
1866		a: Notched arrow	l: With rays	None	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	S1-3008 F-14	1866 north   Coin from J. V. Jones
1866		a: Notched arrow	l: With rays	None	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	S1-3009 F-12.01	Second 6 southwest   Coin from J. V. Jon...
1866		a: Notched arrow	l: With rays	None	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	S1-3010 F-15	1866 northeast   Coin from J. V. Jones
1866		a: Notched arrow	l: With rays	None	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	S1-3011 F-19	Second 6 south   Apparent doubling K11...
1866		a: Notched arrow	l: With rays	None	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	S1-3012	866 north   Photos by Ken Hill
1866		a: Notched arrow	l: With rays	None	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	S1-3013	866 southwest very strong   The repunch...
1866		a: Notched arrow	l: With rays	None	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	S1-3013.5	866 southwest very strong   Later die stag...
1866		a: Notched arrow	l: With rays	None	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	S1-3014 F-17	866 north   Repunching visible only within...
1866		a: Notched arrow	l: With rays	None	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	S1-4000 F-01 MPD-001	Curve of a 6 just above denticles between...
1866		a: Notched arrow	l: With rays	None	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	S1-4001	Curve of a 6 just above denticles between...
1866		a: Notched arrow	l: With rays	None	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	S1-4002 F-01.01	Top of a 1 seen in the space between the...
1866		a: Notched arrow	l: With rays	None	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	S1-6000	
1866		a: Notched arrow	l: With rays	None	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	S1-6001 F-25	Coin from Clarence Gilstad

Figure 1. This is a screen-capture image of the main screen presented by SNV. The center portion is a partial (scrollable) listing of Shield Nickel varieties covered by the database. On the left side are some buttons that aid the user in searching the database.



easy to peruse information in an order other than that in which it was published.

A properly designed computerized reference is an interactive experience for the user. At a minimum, the ability to search the text of the reference for keywords is a vital requirement. But I believe that the computerized reference should do much more. It should allow the user to reorganize the presentation of the data to suit his or her needs. A simple example will make this clear.

Let's hypothesize a reference book for a particular series that focuses on varieties available in the series (e.g., doubled dies, repunched dates, repunched mintmarks, overdates). The typical printed reference book covering a particular coin series will be organized by year, and then might group within a year by the type of variety. Suppose you want to see all of the overdates available in the series. In a printed book, this would probably mean searching the entire book and putting sticky notes on those pages of interest. For a properly designed computerized reference, there would be a command "Show me all the overdates", and use of that command would eliminate all of the non-overdates from view. Searching can also help the user answer questions that a traditional reference book might not cover easily, like "How many doubled dies have been catalogued?"

Interactivity should also allow the end user to successively refine searches. Each time the end user narrows down a search according to a certain criterion, each coin in the program's database that does not fit that criterion is removed from view. The goal should be to allow the end user to narrow the search to a few candidate coins, through which he or she would then make manual comparisons to the target coins. The program should provide sets of criteria that are uniquely designed to meet the needs of the specific reference, which will be driven by the needs of the coin series that the reference covers (that is, the kinds of criteria appropriate for a Shield Nickel reference are going to be very different from a reference on ancient Greek coins, and the computerized reference should be appropriately tailored).

#### SCRIBBLING IN THE MARGINS

Many people like to annotate their printed reference books by writing notes in the margins, or perhaps by using the ubiquitous sticky notes.





Figure 2. This is a screen-capture image of one photograph from the SNV database. The “overlay” feature is on, showing white arrows to highlight the overlay. At top right are thumbnails of other photographs available. Grid-ding, scaling, and rotating are all tools that the end user can use to help in attributing varieties.



There is no reason for users of a computerized reference to give up that capability. A properly designed computerized reference allows users to attach private notes to the data. The fewer constraints placed on these private notes, the better. It is hard to predict what all of the end users will want to record, so a great deal of flexibility should be allowed. Some ideas include:

- Information about the end user's personal holdings
- Notes on coins viewed at coin shows
- Auction records

The concept of private notes can be extended to include the ability to import private photographs into the program's database. In that way, photographs of the end user's coins can be viewed side-by-side with photographs provided in the reference work.

#### THE DEVELOPMENT PHASE

Everybody has read a physical book, and everybody has a pretty good idea of how one is put together. Most likely, you would start by trying to list the topics of the chapters in the book, and then perhaps outline each chapter. You don't have to think too much about the user interface or the feature set of a physical book; perhaps you pick a typeface and a general style, but the user interface was established hundreds of years ago: words on paper that people read.

Developing a computerized numismatic reference takes some additional up-front thinking. As you have seen above, end users will want to use the reference in a non-linear fashion. So, you have to think more about the different ways that people will move about in the reference, and you will have to think more about the feature set your reference provides.

There is no question that the development phase of a computerized reference is more complicated than the development phase of a printed book. But it is a one-time complication. Carefully thought out, and with flexibility built in, the decisions made during development phase will carry you through all the other phases and the lifetime of the reference. Proper decisions in the development phase are what drive the advantages of the computerized reference over the printed reference, and are therefore well worth spending the extra time to develop.



## WEB-BASED VERSUS LOCAL

Let's discuss two different paradigms for a computerized numismatic reference: web-based or local. Each has advantages and disadvantages.

A web-based reference stores all of its data on a web site. Users interact with the data using a browser program (e.g., Internet Explorer, Firefox). The characteristics of a web-based reference are:

- Instant accessibility after purchase.
- No additional software is loaded on the user's computer.
- Functionality of the reference is constrained to functionality easily accessible within a browser.
- Quality of the photos is constrained by the time it takes to download them (users with slow dial-up internet connections must be accommodated).
- Updates to the data are accomplished with no user interaction (the web site gets updated).
- Security requirements are strict since the web site can be compromised by "hackers".
- Requires an active internet connection to access the reference data.

A local reference stores its data on the user's computer. Users interact with the data using a custom-designed program. The characteristics of a local reference are:

- After purchase, the user must wait for a CD/DVD to arrive in the mail.
- Software is loaded on the user's computer, and must operate properly there.
- Functionality of the reference is limited only by the imagination and software capabilities of the author.
- Quality of the photos is essentially unconstrained.
- Updates to the data will require user interaction.
- Security requirements are not as strict as in the web-based model. If the program incorporates some web-based features and the web site is compromised, each individual user's local copy of the program will still operate.
- Reference data can be accessed off-line (no active internet connection required).

A local reference can still make use of web-based resources. Program and data updates can be distributed by posting them to a web site from which users can download them.

At some time in the future, when everybody has very high-speed Internet access, the trade-offs will change. Perhaps the best compromise will be to have a custom program running locally to maximize capability, while storing the actual data of the reference online.

#### LONG-TERM EXPERIENCE WITH SNV

SNV has been available to end users for a number of years now. As I expected, the number of copies shipped has been very small. This confirms that producing SNV as a printed reference was not feasible.

The initial goal of easy upgrades and expandability has been validated. A large number of varieties have been added to the database since the initial release of SNV (the number of varieties has about doubled). The viewing program itself has undergone a few releases for inclusion of new features as a result of user feedback and the author's own experience. Field upgrades of the viewing program have all gone smoothly. Only one user-reported software bug occurred, and it was easily fixed.

I spent a lot of time thinking about the initial design of the user interface and database in the development phase because it is difficult to change once the software package is released. They have held up very well. No one can think of everything, though, and there are a couple things I might have done differently to facilitate some features that did not occur to me initially. This does emphasize the importance of thoroughly thinking through the user interface and database design during the development phase of the product.

#### SOME FINAL THOUGHTS

One direction for the future that interests me is to find a way to make SNV available on handheld computers so it can be easily carried to coin shows. This will have to wait for a more powerful generation of handheld computers to meet the storage and processing needs of SNV.

I hope that with this article that I have set down a few of the basic features any computerized numismatic reference should have, and to show how computerized references can and should differ from printed references. Perhaps I have inspired you to produce a computerized reference covering your specialty?

## The Legend of Storelli

*John W. Adams*

John J. Ford, Jr., began collecting Betts medals in a serious way in the 1960s. Later in that decade, anxious to introduce others to the specialty, Ford indoctrinated Ted Craige. An engineer and avid collector of colonial coinage, Craige became fanatically interested in medals and soon was Ford's main competitor for choice pieces. The pair went to great lengths to build their collections, sometimes collaborating at auctions and sometimes bidding strongly against each other.

The competition expanded to embrace books about medals, with each vying to find non-numismatic material that would enhance their knowledge of the subject. It was Ted Craige who located a copy of Storelli on the shelves of the American Numismatic Society, touching off a race to locate another.

Storelli's *Jean-Baptiste Nini: Sa Vie — Son Œuvre* describes the terracotta medallions crafted by Nini, the most relevant for medal collectors being five different busts of Benjamin Franklin. Ford and Craige thought that the photographic illustrations in the book would provide an edge in acquiring original Nini medallions from the clutter of copies and re-strikes that exist.

The race to locate a Storelli was won by Craige, whose copy was obtained by this writer in 1982 from the Craige estate. Ford did not suffer in silence but, as time went by, dropped regular hints regarding where the Storelli in all fairness belonged. In June 1990, this writer visited Ford in Phoenix and, in a moment of perhaps misguided generosity, gave him the coveted volume as a combined birthday gift and "thank you" for a weekend of warm hospitality. The recipient accepted the gift but, typical of his occasional "paranoia", suggested that it was so generous as to have been prompted by a guilty conscience. This writer somehow refrained from doing injury to the new owner and later re-acquired the



Storelli as lot 882 in Part I of the Ford Library Sale (June 1, 2004). George Kolbe's description of the lot was as follows:

Storelli, A. Jean-Baptiste Nini. *Sa Vie — Son Oeuvre*. Tours: Imprimerie A Mame et Fils, 1896. 177, (1) pages, printed throughout in red and black, title incorporating a fine illustration of a Benjamin Franklin medal, halftone text figure, 108 detailed descriptions, 72 very fine photographically-printed illustrations of medals in the catalogue, five depicting Benjamin Franklin, pencil annotations, typescript index on two leaves tipped in at the end. Quarto: 28.5 x 19.5cm. Reddish-brown cloth, gilt, original printed pictorial card covers bound in, binding extremities a trifle worn. Fine.

No. 44 of only 200 copies printed. Not in Modesti. American Numismatic Society Dictionary Catalogue page 4586 [copy #26, ex libris Wayte Raymond]. Forrer page 276. A classic work. Rarely offered. The pencil markings appear to record an extensive collection, and the several annotations mainly record 1920's sale appearances and unlisted varieties. Loosely laid in are several pages of interesting notes handwritten by John W. Adams.<sup>1</sup>

Kolbe estimated the lot at \$1000. Due no doubt to the legend generated by Craige and Ford, the book fetched \$1955.

By a fateful coincidence, on the weekend that Ford received his Storelli, Kolbe auctioned various correspondence and manuscripts belonging to Adams. Intense competition for the material between Harry Bass and Armand Champa resulted in stratospheric prices. Ford learned of the auction results that same day and because he had sold Adams the material, he now accused Adams of taking advantage of him. When Adams pointed out that a) he had not known the auction results when he presented the gift and b) that Ford had, after selling him the correspondence bragged about "stiffing" him with "all that junk," Ford became contrite, a condition, he it said, in which he rarely found himself. Though suspicious by nature, Ford was also capable of being a warm and generous friend. This writer was the beneficiary of such

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<sup>1</sup> Kolbe's description misses one important attribute: the pages of the volume are neatly glued to stubs, with the stubs forming the spine. At some point, the pages were snipped from the binding before being re-united at a later date. One can only guess at the reason for the dismemberment but the images are lovely and the book was owned by a devout aficionado of Nini. Perhaps the images were part of a grand exhibit, the pages serving to describe the actual *terra cottas* placed above or below them. And quite an exhibit that would have been!

friendship for several decades, with Ford's good deeds overwhelming his occasional peccadilloes.

Storelli has remained on the "most wanted list" here in this country and, thanks to the Internet, also abroad. No copy has appeared at auction, other than the Craige-Adams-Ford example, and none is known to have been sold by private treaty. Then, in August of this year, a French dealer offered the following (translation by the writer):

Jean-Baptiste Nini by A Storelli

In quarto, half Havana Morocco with corners covered, spine with raised bands, arms of the princes de Broglie surmounted by a crown at foot, golden head (Thierry, Sr. de Petit-Simier), medallions, 177 pages. One of 200, number four. Rare. Engraved heraldic ex libris. Fine example of the arms of Amédée de Broglie and of his wife Béatrix de Fancigny-Lucinge, Library of the Château de la Côte à La Morlay (Oise). The author has also published "Notice historique et chronologique sur les châteaux du Blaisois" in 1883. The sculptor Jean-Baptiste Nini, of Italian origin, worked at the Château de Chaumont-sur-Loire, owned by Jacques Le Ray, grand master of the waters and forests at Blois, later steward of the Royal Hospital for Disabled Veterans (Les Invalides). Prince Amédée de Broglie owned numerous medallions by J.-B. Nini pictured in the book.

Not only had a great rarity appeared on the market, but the copy was the very one presented by Storelli to Prince Amédée de Broglie, whose collection of medallions had been used to illustrate the work. For his part, de Broglie had lavished attention on this book, not only the sumptuous leather binding but also marbled end papers, gilt on the upper edges and, most impressive of all, the family crest stamped in gilt on the spine.

No doubt, more copies of this authoritative work will surface over time. However, what is truly remarkable is the colorful history that surrounds the two examples described above: the competition between Craige and Ford, the legend of "Storelli" as it spread amongst the cognoscenti, the gift of a Storelli with the act of mayhem that nearly resulted, and, finally, the fact that the two copies in question were originally owned by individuals who brought together the best collections of Nini terra cottas that are known to have been assembled.

"Storelli" is not a book. It is, rather, a tapestry woven of historical significance, associated personalities, and bibliophilic lust.

## An Evening with Harry Forman

*Leonard Augsburger and Joel Orosz*

On a recent research trip to Philadelphia, in search of all things pertaining to Frank Stewart and the first United States Mint, we spent a few hours with Harry Forman, a long-time coin dealer in the Freedom City. Forman, now in his eighties, resides in a nondescript portion of northern Philadelphia, in a section of tract housing reminiscent of Leavittown, New York, the forerunner of the large-scale American suburban residential construction project. Forman has lived there since the late 1950s and has been in the coin business just as long, having attended forty-nine consecutive ANA conventions from 1956 to 2004. Forman has never had a storefront, working initially out of his basement and later an office. Most of his business is conducted dealer-to-dealer, or with trusted clients.

Forman's long-time business partner is Ruth Bauer, now seventy-eight. Bauer started in the coin business with David Bullowa in 1947 and is one of the few people who have been in the business even longer than Harry. Forman himself began collecting as a child, buying Indian cents for two cents, or two-cent pieces for a nickel. Forman had asthma and was hospitalized in 1932, fortuitously across the street from the Philadelphia dealer James G. Macallister, where Forman made purchases while young. Macallister, of course, handled several of the 1933 twenty-dollar pieces coming from Israel Switt, and Forman would have his own chance in due course.

Forman's introduction to the world of dealing coins began in 1954 when he bought a current proof set at the (third) U.S. mint in Philadelphia for \$2.10. Not long after, he sold the set at the Bullowa store for \$3.00. The ninety-cent profit fascinated him, and he quickly headed to Leary's bookstore in downtown Philadelphia — the very bookstore at which the first of three versions of John McAllister, Jr.'s famous half-disme memorandum came to light — taking home a pile of numismatic



literature to study. He thereby operationalized the celebrated advice of Aaron Feldman, whom Harry counted as a friend and colleague. Forman had been running a fruit business for his father, who had taken ill around 1945. The trade slowed in the winters, and Harry had some extra time to dedicate to the coin business. By the summer of 1956 he was sufficiently established to take a table at the Chicago ANA convention, where he set up in front of a blackboard displaying the changing buy and sell prices for modern proof sets. The following year the ANA came to Philadelphia and Harry took the opportunity to hire Ruth Bauer, who had just had a child. She worked out of her house, billing seven hours at two dollars an hour for the first week. Harry paid her twenty, calling the extra six dollars “a tip”. In time Harry employed many other members of Ruth’s family.

Harry made his mark in the uncirculated roll business, being the first dealer to do this on a large scale. The 1950s and 1960s were a boom time for the hobby, and Forman soon developed a reputation for being a source for uncirculated Morgan thousand-coin bags, which he traded to the extent of “over a thousand bags”. Even the elusive Carson City cartwheels were handled in bag quantities by Forman, who recalled buying 1885-CC bags at \$1600 per, an item worth perhaps half a million dollars today. Amid the rolls and bags Harry still had the occasional interesting deal walk in the door, and one day in 1956 he purchased an ostensibly empty old-time coin cabinet which upon further inspection yielded a 1793 large cent! Forman still has the cabinet. On another occasion Forman handled a group of ten 1855-O gold dollars, all gem uncirculated, which he purchased for forty dollars each and resold for fifty. The highest graded today by PCGS is MS64, and Forman now wonders what became of his mini-hoard.

After a while Harry offered to take us out to the local delicatessen, Jack’s Deli, where he is a long-time customer and well known by the proprietor. A daughter cautioned that it might be better for us to drive, but Harry insisted on taking us in his Cadillac. Forman, at the age of eighty-four, still drives to work every day. At such an age one of course has suffered a few bumps and bruises along the way. Fortunately Harry has a large car to protect him, and a single glance at the sedan immediately indicated that his Cadillac has been doing a good job of that. We got over to Jack’s, taking care to wear our seat belts, in good order. The manager recognized Harry and cheerfully told us that closing time

was in fifteen minutes, and wanted to make sure that we weren't doing "any deals", which might be drawn out for a good period of time. Harry ordered an egg salad sandwich along with Dr. Brown's soda, an eastern brand unknown to us Midwesterners.

Being a dealer in Philadelphia, there was always the question of who knew whom at the mint, and how good one's connections were. Such has been the case since the nineteenth century, and things are no different now. Harry has always been careful to steer clear of any suspicions, although he has been as connected as anyone, counting among his friends Eva Adams and Frank Gasparro. Harry was responsible for the induction of Frank Gasparro into the South Philadelphia High School Hall of Fame, campaigning for Gasparro on the premise that "he had made more money than anyone else". Forman still regularly has dinner with a number of mint engravers and has supported the mint in other ways, including the loan of a Rittenhouse-signed check and a donation to create a bronze model of "Peter", the mint eagle of legend described in 1893 in the *American Journal of Numismatics* (vol. 27, no. 4).

On one occasion Harry came across a group of error coins from the west coast which clearly could not have been manufactured by chance, "that walked out of the mint" with unsavory intentions. Harry sent the group to Eva Adams, and later noticed in the newspapers that a mint foreman had been fired. The marketing of illicit coinage on the west coast was a nice try, but not good enough to escape the attention of the Philadelphia coin dealer. Adams quietly passed along the group to a Secret Service agent, who by chance ran into Forman at a Philadelphia police chiefs meeting. The agent pulled out the same group of coins and asked Forman what he could tell him about them! Another time Forman had a shot at a bag of 1973 half dollars which somehow escaped the mint before they were regularly issued. Forman passed on the deal, and later learned that the Secret Service was at the same minute waiting outside the store where the deal would have taken place.

On the subject of the 1933 twenty-dollar gold piece, most insiders are close-lipped and secrecy is the watchword of the day. The family of Israel Switt, the source of the 1933 double eagles, still operate a store on Philadelphia's Jeweler's Row between Seventh and Eighth streets. Alison Frankel, in her book *Double Eagle*, famously described how she visited the establishment and was quickly dismissed once her business was known. Harry knew Israel Switt, and recounted that Switt once



*Harry J. Forman**Don Taxay*

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Figure 1. Forman ad in *The Numismatist*, January 1975 (courtesy of the American Numismatic Association).



offered Forman a 1933, or at least, that if Harry wanted one, Switt “knew where to get it”. Forman called up John Ford, who advised Harry to avoid the deal as “hot”, which Harry did. The Switt family are currently in litigation against the federal government, represented by Barry Berke, and Forman expects to be a witness if the case ever goes to trial.

Forman was friends with Don Taxay, and related that in fact the two had co-authored an auction catalogue (we had no idea such a thing existed; Gengerke once again comes to the rescue and gives the date as December 1974). Forman was also the driving force behind Scott’s *The Comprehensive Catalogue and Encyclopedia of United States Coins*, engaging Taxay to prepare most of the text and eventually selling the book to Scott. By this time Taxay was already living in India, and on one occasion Forman flew Taxay back to the United States to work on the book. Forman also privately published, in 1972, *How You Can Make Big Profits Investing in Coins*, which he indicated sold to the extent of about fifteen thousand copies, a good success for a numismatic book.

Harry had one of the largest batches of Assay Commission medals ever put together. The group included 110 pieces from John Ford, at ten dollars apiece, ninety from Max Schwartz, and five or ten pieces from Aaron Feldman, who perhaps sold them because no book had yet been written about assay medals. Compare this group of over two hundred pieces against Dreyfuss, a benchmark sale for assay medals (Bowers and Merena, April 1986) which contained “only” 108 pieces. Forman sold the entire group for forty-five dollars each, and purchased a new 1967 Cadillac the next day.

It became clear to us that while Harry had adopted the strategy of becoming known as “just a roll dealer”, his numismatic knowledge was considerably deeper than his reputation would suggest. He admitted that his books were ghost-written by Taxay, but Forman also cited advice received from the man he considered his mentor in the coin business, the late John J. Ford: “Never let the guy you are dealing with know how much you know.” It also became clear to us that one of his greatest assets in the business is his sunny and charming personality. He was a student and admirer of both Ford and Eric P. Newman when they were friends, and maintained excellent relationships with both after that friendship ended. Forman is proudest, however, of the reputation he has earned over the past half-century as a dealer of high integrity.

We finally got on the subject of Frank Stewart. If anyone remembered him, it would be Harry. Stewart died in 1945, and while Forman did not know him personally, he did know Joseph Massetti, who had a great interest in Stewartiana. Massetti was a good customer of Forman's who put together a run of post-1857 proof sets. Massetti also supplied a number of Frank Stewart Electric Company calendars to Forman, who sold them one by one to various clients. The Stewart calendars in 1915 and 1916 came with prints depicting Edwin Lamasure's "Ye Olde Mint" and John Ward Dunsmore's "Inspection of the First U.S. Coins", respectively. These two images have in recent years been hung in the exhibit area of the fourth U.S. Mint on Fifth Street in downtown Philadelphia, but as of late are not on display.

Forman drove us back to his house, albeit in a rather roundabout fashion, being passed along the way by a number of other Philadelphians who apparently were in quite a hurry that evening. He lent us several items for further study, and gave us others as gifts. All in all, it was a most memorable evening with one of the most likable coin dealers in the business.

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## Report on the Meetings in Milwaukee

The NBS Symposium attracted a full house, with the presentations divided between John W. Adams and Harold Welch. Adams talked about the mechanics underlying his new book co-authored with Anne E. Bentley, *Comitia Americana and Related Medals*. He described the key decisions regarding the initial survey of prospective medal holders, the thrust of the research effort, the adoption of stochastic screening for the images and finally the choice of offset over letter press printing. For many in the audience, it was their closest contact with what happens “back stage” and the economics surrounding the whole.

To say that Harold Welch is a collector of books about Conder tokens is gross understatement. Harold is a zealot. He fascinated the audience with his pursuit of a census of all relevant titles, his listing of variants, his discoveries of relationships between authors and, in short, his complete mastery of literature regarding the Conder field. There is a book in the advanced stages of preparation, the title of which runs in excess of 100 words. Library of Congress take notice!

The NBS Board Meeting marked a change at the top. Pete Smith retired as President, giving way to John W. Adams, with all other officers and directors continuing on and Len Augsburger joining the Board.

David Sundman, our Secretary-Treasurer, delivered his typically complete report. Paid memberships are 344 (virtually unchanged) and we have more than \$22,000 in the bank. He displayed a new membership card created by himself and an NBS pin, which he offered with less enthusiasm.

In contrast, great enthusiasm was expressed about plans for *The Asylum* under the aegis of our very talented editor, David Yoon. Indeed we felt so confident on this front that it was agreed to launch several initiatives at the general membership meeting.

The NBS Members Meeting was well attended by a spirited group that participated in all facets of the agenda. Pete Smith, who retired after six years at the helm, was given a warm salute for his many contributions on our behalf. After membership and financial reports by David Sundman, incoming president Adams explained three initiatives proposed by the Board. The first is the preparation of a homage to George Kolbe, our founder and, indubitably, the creator of the hobby



of collecting numismatic literature. Scott Rubin will write and assemble a variety of material, including the favorite "George stories" of any member who is motivated to submit one.

In the same spirit of documenting our club's heritage, Joel Orosz will complete a history of our first 28 years. Again, members are invited to provide Joel with relevant stories and artifacts. We have a rich tradition that can be made richer with your support.

The third initiative, the 100 Greatest Pieces of Numismatic Literature, will be led by Len Augsburger. It is not too early to give him suggestions (leonard\_augsburger@hotmail.com) but you will get a second chance to provide input when a draft of the list is published in *The Asylum*. At the very least, this project will be fun and, at best, we will wind up with a useful guide for present and future collectors.

In addition to volunteering for two important club assignments, Len and Joel gave an outstanding presentation on the evolution of the mint. We were treated to a rich array of sketches, paintings and photographs, enhanced by the speakers' insightful commentary. A measure of the listeners' appreciation was indicated by the aggressive bidding for mint-related items in the auction that followed. Record proceeds from the auction were a fitting conclusion to a 75-minute meeting that fled by all too quickly.

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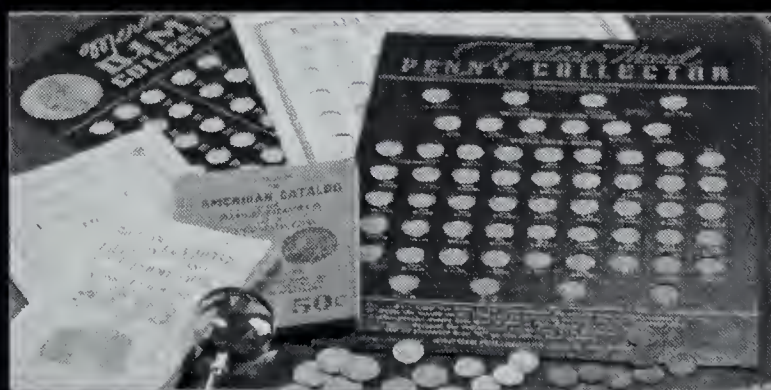
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